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On Hearing Together Critically:

Making Aural Politics Sensible Through Art & Ethnography

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Abstract

This article investigates the politics of sensing through the productions of aurality enacted at tourist and heritage venues in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Drawing on six summers of fieldwork with tourist producers in the region, the article traces how aural experiences and stances are used to make and manage frontier worlds for tourists. It argues that the exploitation and colonization of local Lakota lifeworlds is crucial to producing frontier experiences and that aural modes are the most powerful and subtle means to managing these experiences. It introduces three experiments to critically engage how hearing and listening are shaped along racial lines at these venues and argues for the necessity of more artistic approaches to ethnography. Ultimately, the article claims that anthropologists must grapple with both the representational and sensorial politics of their presently embodied practices and future knowledge productions.

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On Hearing Together Critically: Making Aural Politics Sensible Through Art & Ethnography

Jen Heuson

They do not hear me, he says; they listen and listen but don't hear what I say.

On a July afternoon, a group of German tourists gather at the foot of Mato Paha, or Bear Mountain, in the northern Black Hills of South Dakota. Some, like myself, have just descended the sacred mountain; others sit in the shade, chatting about dinner or the next destination. I rest with an elder Oglala Lakota man. He tells me again why he doesn't like to give interviews. "I am always talking," he says, "but people do not listen. Maybe it's the language. I can tell you what happened to my people in German or French," he explains, "but not English. It's too painful." So, I just sit with him and listen, trying to hear all that he cannot say... all that sits quietly in between his words, in his breath and in the way he holds his head slightly tilted. I have spent a lot of time learning how to listen and how not to. I have learned that sometimes just being present is enough.

Following six summers of fieldwork researching aural heritage and politics in the Black Hills of South Dakota, I returned for a final visit to share my findings with those who had been instrumental to my work. These included heritage and tourism professionals and the general public of locals and tourists. I conducted professionalization seminars, held public talks and film screenings, and even led a "listening and remembering" hike for grandparents and their grandkids. Initially, I was excited by the responses I received. But, the enthusiastic "I finally get what you're doing" was quickly supplanted by a much more daunting question: "What do I do now?" Those whom I had managed to convince of the profound power of aural politics to modulate mood or tune bodies and minds now wanted to know how to harness it accurately and ethically. They wanted to know how to make the past sensible in the present. They wanted to know how to share sense across times, places, and peoples. This article explores my response.

In the following pages, I will, first, briefly outline the core conceptual finding of my research, namely the significant difference between aural politics and other sound-based approaches, such as soundscape preservation, sound ethnography, and sonic criticism. I will, then, discuss how crucial this

stance is to the present "experiential" and "sensorial" moment of heritage tourism, ethnography, and sound and sensory studies. The latter portion of the article will develop my approach to both making aural politics sensible (able to be sensed) and to offering the possibility of a presently embodied critique of sense in the form of a critical aural politics or a "hearing together critically." The article will make use of field recordings and images from my work in the Black Hills to define and locate aural politics and to situate these politics within the current cultural moment. I will introduce three experiments to argue for the essential role of artistic approaches to ethnography in making aural politics sensible (and hence possible to critique). At the crux of these experiments is the need to build critical presences able to foreground sensing as a political act that must delicately navigate what can and ought to be shared with the demands of cultural and economic sovereignty.

Introduction – Hearing and Listening in the Black Hills

Located in western South Dakota, the Black Hills are among the most sacred, contested, and popular tourist regions in the United States. Each year, millions visit area sites that include Mount Rushmore and Crazy Horse Memorials, Deadwood, Devils Tower, the Badlands, and the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Tourists come to witness the world's largest mountain carvings, to walk the infamous streets of Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane, and to ride the Hill's many tiny, winding highways. They come to explore caves and canyons, to bathe in healing hot springs, and to escape the noise and crowds of contemporary urban life. In fact, tourists have been "escaping" to the Black Hills for more than 125 years. As early as 1892, seven trains a day brought visitors to the region (Schumacher 2007:70), and by the 1920s, the Standard Oil Company marketed this small swathe of land as "the most marvelous hundred square miles on earth" (Julin 2009:5). The marvel offered tourists blended natural and cultural wonders like buffalo and powwows with historic events that marked Western expansion and the occupation of sacred Indigenous lands. Today, the South Dakota Department of Tourism draws upon the region's many natural, cultural, and historic resources to sell tourists experiences of American heritage. In 2012, the state launched its "Your American Journey" campaign to promote its unique offerings (SD Tourism 2012). And, in 2013, the state's tourist industry earned an estimated \$2 billion dollars (IHS Global Insight 2014).

Tourism is big business in South Dakota, and like elsewhere in the American West, it relies upon producing experiences that draw heavily from frontier histories and mythologies. These include the wildness of Western lands, the moral rightness and strength of male characters, and the transformative power of technology in addition to typified "cowboy and Indian" stories. Much like tourism myths more generally, frontier experiences are

thought to deeply alter the peoples and places involved, albeit through mostly violent conflict (Slotkin 1998). In the Black Hills, experiences ranging from buffalo encounters to Teddy Roosevelt reenactments to dynamite explosions draw in differing ways from decades of frontier cultural production. Essentially, tourist producers in the region utilize both history and popular culture to make experiences for tourists that simultaneously serve as national and local heritage and as crucial economic resources. And, much like other extractive industries, heritage tourism locates its experiential resources in specific peoples, places, and things. The Black Hills offers an exemplary instance of frontier heritage because of its unique history and natural features. Most notably, it is the location of the massacre marking the end of the so-called “Indian Wars” (Ostler 2004). Just along the southeastern edge of the Black Hills is the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, home to the Oglala Lakota and one of the most enduring symbols of cultural genocide in the United States, Wounded Knee (Giago 2013). For South Dakota’s heritage and tourism industries, Wounded Knee is a foundational experiential resource. For Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota peoples, it is a sacred site of reverence and mourning.

At the crux of both heritage and tourism is the ability to make sense, that is, to make the body *feel* or to produce affects that are physical, emotional, and intellectual and to link these to times and to places. An affect is a force or intensity that can make the body shiver or cry, move quickly or stand still. Affects can be ordinary or radically new; they can be as subtle as a tingle or as shocking as an explosion. For anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, affects feel like things happening or things we are in, and they are often shared, a form of “collective sensing out” (2009). Creating sense that is both shared and presently embodied is fundamental to the success of experiential industries, making affect management central to tourist production. One of the most important modes of managing affect is through sound. Whether mood music, audio tours, and performances or the preservation of environmental soundscapes, sound in its varied forms works to forge common sentiments and senses such as fear or freedom. In the Black Hills, yodeling cowboys, growling buffalo, and screeching steam trains are among the many sounds used to produce frontier affects. A frontier affect is the feeling of being literally *in* a frontier – a wild zone at the edge of time and space. Importantly, the Black Hills’ frontier is also made sensible through the vibrations of hundreds of thousands of motorcycles, through the wild whipping of high prairie winds, and through the “silent” evocations of noble “Indians” like Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse. Thus, understanding how hearing, listening, and sound making, are used to produce frontier experiences requires a conceptual and practical engagement with the silences, vibrations, hauntings, and other aural forms crucial to generating bodily and emotional impacts.

The management of affect and its use to produce experiences for tourists involves activating the histories and myths of peoples, places, and things

and making these available for commodification and embodiment. To do this, producers must be able to mediate materials and non-materials, like stories and memories, and they must be able to offer these mediations as worlds to inhabit. The task of my research in the Black Hills has been to investigate how frontier worlds are created and maintained and what they do. The most pervasive, yet subtle, form of world making is through the production of “aurality” – the quality, condition, or degree of being aural, of the ear or sense of hearing (Collins 2014). Aurality is not just about sound, but describes the process of mediating and making sound, noise, and silence, and linking these to emotional and physiological effects. Following sound historian Veit Erlmann, aurality is the interpenetration of the cultural and the biological (2010:17), and it precludes how and what we are as sensory beings and communities. It is a “stancing” of the ears that attunes to moods and atmospheres, while also teaching modes of listening and hearing. In the Black Hills, the consistent production of a “frontier aurality” works to ensure the region is maintained as an experiential artifact of frontier histories and myths. Shootouts held six times each summer day along Deadwood’s Main Street, for example, preserve aural stances celebrating gun noise as powerful and fun, while daily rides on Hill City’s 1880 Train teach how to hear and feel the whistles and screeches of industrial technologies as divine and progressive. [🔊 DeadwoodShootout and 🔊 1880Train] As a researcher, my task, thus, became figuring out how to document and critique the aural stances made and solidified through decades of frontier tourism in the region.



I use Dimensional Stereo Microphones (DSM) by Sonic Studios to record the Days of '76 parade as it winds its way down Deadwood’s Main Street. The annual event started in 1924 as a way to attract newly mobile tourists to Deadwood. Today, it is still an important celebration of local heritage. *Photo by Ali Pitt, July 2014*

Defining and Locating Aural Politics

I began fieldwork in the Black Hills with three important misconceptions that shaped my early theoretical and methodological approach to aural politics. First, I believed that sound was a thing that could be quantified and contained and, hence, documented and offered as evidence of present social conditions. Second, I approached tourism in the Black Hills as a postcolonial condition. And, finally, I thought that frontier tourism was essentially about experiencing the past, not shaping the future. In each of these, I was mistaken. After sixty interviews with tourist producers and the documentation of over one hundred heritage sites, I began to understand how inadequate the methods of soundscape study, sound ethnography, and sonic criticism were to engaging the production of frontier affect in the Black Hills. I also began to understand just how colonial social and institutional structures were in the Black Hills, including the consistent use of Lakota “ways of life” as a primary experiential resource. While South Dakota’s tourist industry draws on the lifeworlds of Native peoples to profit mostly non-Native individuals and organizations, actual Lakota endure extreme poverty and racism ranging from anti-Native hate crimes (King 2012) to state practices of placing Lakota children in non-Native foster care (Iron Eyes 2013). In short, as my work progressed in the Black Hills, I began to understand that the state’s tourist industry relied on sensory assumptions that reproduced stark contrasts between the natural and cultural world and between Native and non-Native peoples. These contrasts were produced most often through the forms of frontier aurality enacted at heritage and tourism venues.

The National Museum of Woodcarving (NMW) located in the central Black Hills, just a few miles outside of Custer, is one small, but exemplary instance of the current forms of frontier aurality. The museum is home to a collection of woodcarvings from chiropractor-turned-artist Dr. Harry Niblack and contains more than thirty carving scenes animated using mechanical gears, music, and narration. It also houses a carving studio (including resident and guest carvers), two gift shops, a theater (running a 20-minute Niblack biopic), and a gallery of contemporary carvings from across the country. NMW boasts that it is “Where Wood Comes Alive” (NMW flyer 2013). Yet, it is not only sound that animates Niblack’s carvings. NMW is a place where visitors can feel the affects of a civilizing process (Elias 2000), a central tenet of frontier mythology and colonial conquest. Through juxtapositions between sound, noise, and silence, NMW constructs a frontier experience where the natural world of “dead” wood and “Indians” are transformed into living culture through the mechanical skill and artistry of one man. In this case, visitors not only learn what specific sounds and noises to associate with modernity, they also learn to link Native peoples with silence and inaudibility. In short, visitors learn that progress entails a transformation of sensation through aurality. Just briefly, I will recount the experience.

A larger-than-life sized “Indian,” intricately carved and painted, greets visitors to NMW. He stands tall, guarding and mediating the space between door, theater, gift shop, and gallery. He does not speak, nor is he named. He looks up with eyes slightly open, head tilted, body poised perhaps to dance; he holds a wooden shaker readied for play. He listens, intently and silently, to something the visitor cannot hear. Surrounding him are the sounds of creaking gears and a ringing cash register, the voice of Niblack’s film narrator, and a woman telling how to use the wooden nickels in the gallery. Another, much smaller carving, a “Geronimo” bust by John Burke, is located at the gallery exit, welcoming visitors to the carving studio and the gift shop to follow. “Geronimo” gazes forward with ears prominent and poised, listening, like his fellow “Indian,” for things unheard and surrounded by the busyness of scratching, scraping, and carving wood.

Sylvester, the old Black Hills miner, opens the “Niblack Collection” of NMW. He speaks in a stereotypical dialect and is joined by a silent parrot and surrounded by mining artifacts that include a rusty track and a train car full of rocks. Underneath his voice are the clicks and buzzes of the electrical pulses moving his wooden jaw. Passing Sylvester, visitors encounter signs instructing how to behave in the museum and a string of scenes that represent western themes while highlighting Niblack’s craft. Visitors pass saloons and operating rooms that fill the gallery with low churning, cranking sounds until they reach Dusty The Gambler, a card-playing cowboy tucked in a gallery corner. Pushing Dusty’s button sounds an out-of-tune piano and prompts his John-Wayne-like voice. [🔊 NMW]

A few scenes past Dusty is Niblack’s only “Indian” animated scene. It is labeled “Running Elk and Josephine” and is without any context other than instructions printed in the NMW guide: “Hold button for five seconds and you will see our Indian friends come to life” (2013). Josephine sits, holding a ceramic bowl and wearing leather, beads, and feathers, in a carved and painted chair to Running Elk’s right. Running Elk stands in blue jeans, a black cowboy hat, red ascot, and blanket; a drum is strapped to his chest, and he holds a mallet. Visitors push a button to animate the couple. Josephine begins to breathe, her chest moving up and down. Running Elk rhythmically beats his drum, his beat slowing and stopping and starting along with his aging wires and gears. Neither speaks, and except for faint drumming, visitors hear the creaking gears and buzzing electricity of Niblack’s animation process. [🔊 RunningElklandJosephine]



Running Elk and Josephine are one of Dr. Niblack's many animated woodcarving scenes located at the National Museum of Woodcarving in Custer, South Dakota. The museum is owned and operated by Dale Schaffer. *Photo by author, July 2013*

The encounter detailed here is typical of both tourist experiences and local heritage in the Black Hills. It presumes that the natural world is mostly silent and that civilization and culture involve music, voice, and technological sounds punctuated by the noise of machines and other devices necessary to progress. It also presumes the divide between nature and culture is a racial divide between Native and non-Native peoples. The visitor can never hear what Josephine does or the sound of her breathing in and out. Her ears are neither cultured nor mediated. Running Elk is perhaps somewhere in between; he is “becoming modern” through dress and stance and ears. He sounds for the visitor both the faint drumming of his past life and the squeaking and creaking of modern machines. The scene of Running Elk and Josephine is not one of innocent intercultural contact, and it is not a scene that merely represents a lost silence or past way of listening or hearing. What occurs here is an active training of ears, a learning to listen and to hear that generates sensory orders, generating also what sounds are and what they do. In this example, the tourist journey through Niblack's museum reproduces the bodily and emotional impacts of mythologized frontier transformations. Here, visitors learn that to stand still and be silent is to be a part of the natural, but “dead” world; conversely, to cut, chisel, creak, and crank is to be “alive” – mobile and civilized. In other words, Niblack's carving and animating sound the pro-

cess of “becoming civilized,” while also making it felt as something intrinsically moral and ethical. This and dozens of similar examples taught me that critically engaging racist sensory assumptions would require defining and locating the consistent relational patterns of who and what could be heard. Thus, in the Black Hills, aural politics must engage not only how and what is “sounded” but all that undergirds sound as backgrounds, pauses, lapses, hauntings, or silences.

The Role of the Aural in Making Sense Today

The production of audibility must be understood within the current aural and sensory “Zeitgeist” both in academia and popular culture more widely. Despite recent critical attention to sound and the senses, the current “sensual turn” (Howes 2003:29) in contemporary culture and research largely adheres to what Jonathan Sterne calls “the audiovisual litany” or the assumption that hearing is an idealized “pure interiority” while vision is rational and abstract (2003:15). This litany recurs in many forms from the “ear-man” and “eye-man” of media theorists Walter Ong (2012) and Marshall McLuhan (1994) to the longing for past soundscapes of composer and theorist R. Murray Schafer (1993). Approaches that follow “the audiovisual litany” presume that “sound draws us into the world while vision separates us from it” (Sterne, 2003:18). This division aligns the ear with subjective and irrational experiences that are difficult to critique or locates hearing and listening in teleologies of historical and social transformations that are finished or contained. The litany is further deepened in the division between the eye and ear and the presumed baser senses of touching, tasting, and smelling. And, while historians such as Mark M. Smith (2004) and Alain Corbin (1998) document the role of the ear and of sense in past social and political conflicts and anthropologists including Steven Feld (1982) and David Howes investigate the senses as the “social relations” (2003:xi) of other peoples and places, these sorts of studies serve to undergird popular understandings of sound and sense as objects that can be understood and known. The widespread acceptance of sense as “object” is used to justify, colonize, and exploit cultural and racial difference, most often by claiming it “natural” or “historical” or by offering it as an affective or atmospheric commodity.

Many uses of sound exploit its unique quality as both objective and subjective, making it a thing to be made or preserved *and* a means to accessing some hidden or unknowable realm. This dual role of sound occurs in a wide range of popular cultural productions including film, music, and advertising but also urban design, environmental protection, and heritage preservation. The general trend is to offer sound as evidence of others' ways of being, feeling, sensing, and knowing and to use this evidence to create increasingly immersive methods of embodying other lifeworlds. In 2006, for

example, the U.S. National Park Service added the “acoustical environment” to its list of resources to protect, claiming that cultural and historic sounds were significant as “intangible aspects of cultural expression” and important to visitors’ abilities “to better understand and embrace America’s heritage in a direct and personally meaningful way” (NPS 2009). Such approaches rely on the naturalization of both sound and sonic experience and deny the training needed to hear and to listen. They also employ sound as a means to managing sense more generally. The presumption is that heritage producers need only protect materials in order to preserve “emotions, attitudes, and memories” (NPS 2014). Yet, the categorization of sound and its value cannot be taken as fact. These are consequences of present and historical social and sensory relations. They are also the result of current preoccupations with the study and manipulation of sound, on one hand, and with urban noise pollution and the presumed scarcity of experiences of silence, on the other (Keizer 2010; Prochnik 2010). As urban life seems to grow louder, quiet becomes an ever more valuable resource, one that must be made or located elsewhere. Predicated on scarcity and a land-based spiritualism coopted from Native peoples (McAvoy 2002), silence has become crucial to heritage production and tourism in the Black Hills. But, of course, listeners must be taught to *hear* the silences they encounter. For example, the consistent use of the Lakota phrase “Paha Sapa” to refer to the Black Hills on tourist flyers and signs evokes the region as ancient and spiritual as well as conquered and occupied.

Ultimately, the most important forms of aural politics I consistently encountered in the Black Hills are not about sound *per se*, but center on producing aural experiences that generate what is audible as “sound” in the first place. These include Native silence as background, atmosphere, or mood for “civilizing” sound and noise making and New Age appropriations of Native hearing. Such productions, in turn, create inaudibility through both “noise” (excess) and “silence” (absence) and act as crucial pedagogical moments for listeners. For music theorist Jacques Attali (1985:6), the organization of sound into music and noise is a fundamental form of power, a tool to consolidate a community. But, what remains *unsounded* is equally important to the shaping of a common ear and to determining who is and is not a part of the “sounded” community. In one of the most dramatic instances of aural experience in the Black Hills – night dynamite blasting at Crazy Horse Memorial – stark divisions between the sound of sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski’s voice, the noise of blasting dynamite, and the haunting silence of Crazy Horse work to affirm power relations between a conquering and a conquered people, using aural politics to shape who belongs to each. [▶▶ CrazyHorseNightBlast]

Importantly, this is not merely an instance of “imperialist nostalgia” (Rosaldo 1989) that can be located in stereotypical sound designs, but entails the naturalizing of ears that continue to divide sensory worlds along racial lines. And, in this case, the visceral and emotional impacts of frontier

conquest (via dynamite exploding contested sacred land) are felt as powerful, celebratory, and good while Lakota peoples remain a “silent” natural resource to preserve or protect. What is needed is a critical approach able to engage how audibility is shaped by ever shifting cultural, social, economic, and physical factors.

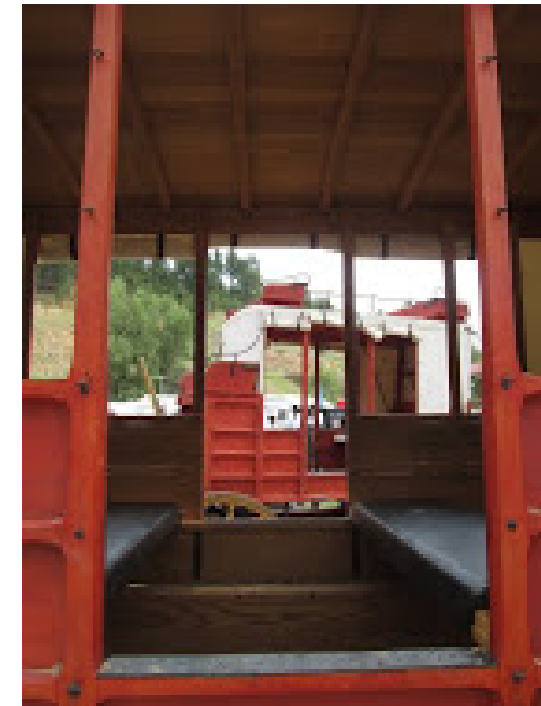
Three Experiments in Making Aural Politics Sensible

Determining how to make aural politics something that can and should be discussed is a difficult task involving, on the one hand, finding ways to challenge aural assumptions that feel as self-evident as the beauty of a bird’s song and, on the other hand, giving critical attention to aural effects that seem spontaneous or beyond control, like a shiver or a stance. What is needed are creative ways to explore how the aural exerts forces on the body, mediating the material world and the immaterial realm of stories, epistemologies, emotions, and psychological states. Such experiments would need to engage both the presently embodied uses of aural politics and how these are made, including the subtle ways hearing and listening are passed along and inherited or appropriated and colonized. The aural, in fact, often works to suture or close sensory gaps so that contained lifeworlds can be made available as tourist or other types of experiences, as affective commodities, or as objects of research and heritage preservation. The crux of aural politics demands interrupting the naturalized flow of sensing in the present such that some form of critical distance can emerge. These interruptions would need to: 1) Mind the gap between various modes of sensing; 2) Create live instances of listening and hearing together; and 3) Allow for critical sensing in the present. I will briefly trace an example of each.

One of the most important ways that tourist and heritage professionals produce experiences of contained lifeworlds is by ensuring that sensing is a seamless occurrence. This process involves employing the representational, aesthetic, and sensory forms standardized for the venue and using these to produce immersive affects, or bodily and emotional feelings of “being in” another world. While the work of museum and heritage professionals, anthropologists, and historians most often seek to ensure seamless sensing occurs, experimental artists from Jackson Pollock to Nathaniel Dorsky attempt to engage the constructed and elusive nature of sense itself. As Dorsky notes, films that “fill in too much” violate the intermittent nature of our daily sensory experiences (2005:31). This approach can be useful in generating critical gaps in tourist and heritage production. But, rather than create experiences that are *either* immersive *or* detached, I suggest an experimental approach involving “intermittent immersion” or “asynchronous” relations between the senses (Heuson 2014). This basically entails making experiences that weave between positions of sensory immersion and critical distance by either alter-

ing sensory relations and synchronicities (Jung 1973) – between eyes and ears, for example – or by interrupting sensory flows or “distributions” produced through standardized form and content relations (Rancière 2004:42). The exact forms of these interruptions will depend upon the specific venue and its sensory-political stakes. Ultimately, the goal is to challenge the idea that sense ratios (McLuhan 1994) or sensory worlds (Hoffer 2003) are ever distinct, contained, or finished.

Experiment 1: Interrupting the presumed synchronicity of ear-eye relations in the audiovisual exhibitions normally used to produce mood, atmosphere, or immersion in museums is one way to challenge common aural assumptions. This approach involves using images and sound recordings to create *asynchronous museum experiences* through exhibits that intermittently make and then break the coeval presence of looking and listening. In this case, the causally shared time and space of sensing is both produced and challenged. For example, sound recordings of Deadwood’s historic Days of ’76 Parade would be joined with still images to give attention to the distinct practices of static looking and sampled listening and their cultural linking. Images and sounds would move between “sync” and “non-sync” relations, meaning that the time and space of recordings would only be shared occasionally. This could be accomplished by altering the position (time and/or space) of either image or sound. So, a photograph of the parade in 1932 could be paired with a sound recording of the parade that moves from 1932 to 2010 and back to 1932. A 2013 image of the interior of the Deadwood Stagecoach could be paired with 2013 sound recordings that move from interior to exterior. [🔊] Days of ’76] The possible combinations are infinite. Even a subtle change in narrator tone could alter the audiovisual experience and its affects. Here, the goal is to generate lapses to critical effect not to force disinterest or confusion, so these shifts must be noticeable while not destroying the possibility of shared sense more generally. Thus, these are critical pauses in common sense rather than arguments for extreme relativism.



The Deadwood Stagecoach prepares for the Days of ’76 Parade, a historic part of Deadwood’s annual Days of ’76 rodeo. The stagecoach is normally housed in the Days of ’76 Museum, owned and operated by Deadwood History, Inc. *Photo by author, July 2013*

In this experiment, one of the primary goals is to respond to a methodological approach common to heritage producers, the desire to document and understand other lifeworlds through sensory experience. In South Dakota, this approach is foundational to the state’s tourist economy and to its forms of exploiting and colonizing local Lakota peoples. But, rather than question only the content of these productions, I aim to challenge the basic assumption that sensing equals knowing. This is a response to the function of sensory knowledge in the state’s tourist infrastructure, where “knowing” is the result of a mythic frontier journey. In this journey, encounters with “Native South Dakota” do not produce knowledge of local Lakota peoples, but act as media of transformation for non-native tourists to acquire self-understanding in the form of heritage experiences. This is basic frontier mythology, but it is also materialized in how museum exhibits and heritage performances are made in the region. And, it accounts for a sentiment that recurred throughout my fieldwork with local Lakota performers and producers – the feeling that no matter how much tourists listened, they could never hear.

Another important aspect to the seamless production of lifeworlds involves the uncritical use of sound and aurality. While critical approaches to visibility, including representations and forms of display and interaction, are fairly common among producers and tourists, similar approaches to sound

and aurality are not. This is not to say that stereotypical images and practices of looking do not occur, but rather, to note that image making is generally understood as a problematic process with legal and political ramifications. This understanding does not translate easily to aural practices. There are a number of reasons for this. First, sound itself is engaged with minimal criticism. When critique does occur, it most often focuses on such things as stereotypical music and accents or on ownership rights. Second, categorical and moral distinctions between sounds, noises, and silences are presumed to be self-evident and natural with no bearing on social or political relations. In other words, producers assume that who and what is sounded is either arbitrary or that any sounding at all is indicative of inclusion and pluralism. And, finally, the bodily and emotional affects generated through sounds, noises, and silences are considered subjective and incidental or beyond control. Thus, there is little critical engagement with practices of sonic branding (Jackson 2004) or with uses of sound to create mood (Sterne 1997). Environmental factors, including spatial design and architecture, are also rarely noted for their aural effects. I suggest that creating instances of live listening and hearing together is a first important step to intervening in the generally uncritical understandings of sound and aurality.

Experiment 2: To create critical instances of *live hearing and listening together*, it is important to challenge the standardized aural stances as well as how these are normally discussed (or not) and translated into foundations of knowledge or understanding. There are many possible ways to produce interventions in collective aural experience, including the practices of soundwalking (Westerkamp 1974) and filmless film festivals (Third Coast 2013) or alterations to more traditional audio or live tours and other types of tourist or heritage performance, such as talks or concerts. The crux of this intervention is to call attention to a shared aural heritage and to offer tools to critically engage this heritage in the present. My own experiments have ranged from leading soundwalks along Deadwood's historic Main Street to offering "listening and remembering" hikes at the Outdoor Campus in Rapid City. Unlike uses of soundwalking by the World Soundscape Project, however, these cases do not focus solely on the acoustic environment or on the presumed inability of "numbed" modern ears to hear "delicate and quiet sounds" (Westerkamp 1974). Instead, these presumptions become problems to interrogate through differing stances of the ears and through critical discussions about how and why these stances occur. For example, at the Wounded Knee Museum in Wall, South Dakota, a soundwalk could engage how the events depicted are "sterilized" through active sound design – including the sequestering of the museum's only audio exhibit to a darkened corner room of folding chairs – and through the aural effects of architecture and the museum's placement on Wall's overly kitschy Main Street. What is heard as visitors read of Lakota women and children running in horror or stare at the infamous

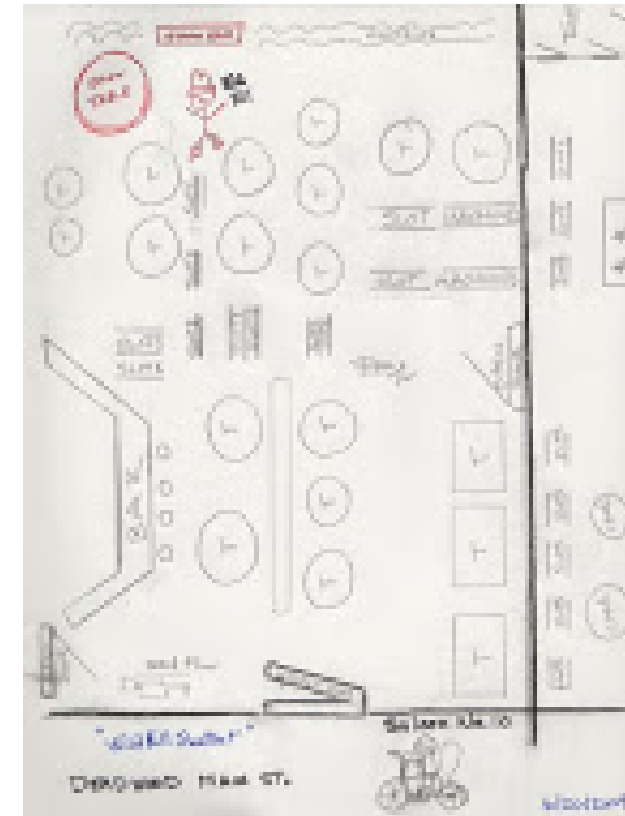
image of Chief Big Foot dead and frozen in the snow is *a big, open, soft, buzzing whooshing surrounding sound* like being literally inside a very large dry cleaner. The museum's one large room with glaring white walls, fluorescent lighting, lengthy air vents, and cement floor dramatically alter how the story of Lakota massacre is felt. Here, the formal elements shaping the Wounded Knee narrative serve to produce unsentimental and detached affects. Ultimately, the goal of a critical soundwalk in this case would be to engage how and why these affects arise and to discuss their social and political impacts.

This experiment responds to the general lack of critical engagement with the inherited forms of aural production documented during my fieldwork. While many producers acknowledged the effects of material forms on how tourists encountered the stories and lifeworlds offered, these effects were often thought "beyond control" because of lack of funding and larger infrastructural or institutional constraints. In many cases, producers were sympathetic to critiques involving the content of sound displays, but did not possess the vocabulary to critically examine the relations between the material forms of their displays and the affects they produced for visitors. Even more importantly, formal relations were always depoliticized. The Wounded Knee Museum example illustrates both how important form is to tourist experience and how its uncritical engagement is supported by economic constraints and larger state discourses of inclusion. During my visits to the museum, tourists commented on how "sterile" the museum felt, how "cold" it was, and some even called it "terrible," moving quickly through displays. Rather than appraisals of the museum's content, however, these comments point to how the Wounded Knee story is altered through its current sensory form. After a fire in 2012, the museum relocated to a modern building on Wall's Main Street. Space in the building, owned by the non-profit organization Lakota Ways, was donated for the museum's reopening in 2013. While marking an increase in visibility for the story, the new building is in stark contrast to the meandering, home-like space of the old museum. In this case, a critical soundwalk is a relatively easy and inexpensive way to engage both producers and tourists in attempts to articulate the relation between form and content. It does not force Lakota exclusion, but also does not deny public appraisal of *how* this inclusion occurs.

Finally, it is also crucial to be able to challenge the collective force of sensory productions that generate or rely upon similar aural assumptions and affects. If each case, each heritage or tourist site and event, is examined independently, it is impossible to engage the full force of what is being made and shared, making it difficult also to ascertain that these are consequences of common cultural assumptions. In other words, producers and tourists tend to focus critique on individual cases, while ignoring the wider nexus of cultural production and its impacts. This approach denies what is most crucial to tourist experience – the desire to escape to, be immersed in, or be a part of

some other world (Clifford 1997:66) and to share this world with others (Kaplan 1996:ix). It also denies that individual productions participate in larger institutional and ideological structures, such as South Dakota's "Your American Journey" campaign or frontier tourism myths more generally. Finally, it denies that affective forces are the result of sensory relations, not individual contained instances of sensing. What makes a trip to the Black Hills different from reading a book or watching a film are the bodily and emotional impacts of a collection of experiences. These impacts both draw from and are translated into "understanding" or "knowledge" of peoples and places and, thus, become very important political acts that can help continue cycles of racism and exploitation. Stopping racist and exploitative cycles of sensory production requires experimental works able to critically engage how and why particular sensory relations recur in the present.

Experiment 3: In this case, intervention requires offering a tool that is both accessible and thought-provoking, one able to teach critical aurality to a wide range of audiences across multiple locations and types of activities. In this experiment, the sensory relations and assumptions that recur across tourist and heritage experiences in a region would be articulated and evaluated through the familiar form of the tourist guidebook. With some modifications, the guidebook can be transformed into a *critical tourist fieldguide* able to engage tourists in the moral and ethical implications of hearing and listening. For example, *A Fieldguide to Listening in the Black Hills* would gather the key insights of my own research into a multimodal, pocket-sized notebook. This interactive notebook would provide aural tours of Black Hills sites using maps, archival and ethnographic media, and history and folklore. The guide would come with a CD of field recordings as well as a website of additional recordings, interviews, and documentations from my research. It would be designed to encourage critical aural ethnography through sound walks and maps, listening exercises, and engagements with regional aural conflicts. It would offer spaces for taking aural field notes or creating sound maps and diaries as well as providing discussion prompts and field recording tips. By offering tourists "journeys" through their ears, the guide would teach the importance of aurality to how we encounter and understand other peoples and places. But, it would move beyond this to introduce and counter some of the racist aural stereotypes crucial to frontier tourism. The guide could be used inter-generationally as well as across audiences that include tourists and heritage tourism professionals and would transform sound and aurality from naturalized objects and stances into historically conditioned problems.



A sound map is one example of how aurality can be critically engaged by altering how sound is represented. Here, the many material elements of a moment of hearing and listening at the No. 10 Saloon in Deadwood are sketched. This helps to pause sound momentarily in order to encounter how it is made. *Illustration by author, June 2009*

Here, my experiment responds to two important reactions from producers and tourists: first is the claim that individual sites do not share common aural or sensory assumptions, and second is the belief that sensing is itself a subjective, individual act. In both cases, what producers and tourists said did not fit with what they did. And, more importantly, these claims acted as ways to deny or dismiss potentially problematic assumptions. For example, during a number of public talks I conducted in 2014 with non-Native audiences, I outlined a consistent pattern of aural production documented at dozens of sites and events throughout the Black Hills. I call this pattern "frontier aurality," and it goes something like this: the natural environment or earth is essentially silent; technologies are the noisy but necessary means to civilizing the earth; and sounded culture is the harmonious world in between of music, language, and voice. There was general agreement until I argued that Native peoples were positioned not as active participants of sounded culture, but as silent mediators of the natural environment. Producers reacted roughly along three lines: arguing that their site was unique; blaming it on tourists;

or claiming site design elements resulted from Lakota participation. Tourists reacted by arguing that individuals “hear” these silences, noises, and sounds based upon personal, not collective, experience. Yet, my fieldwork interviews and observations showed that both producers and tourists were very invested in shared sensory experience. Thus, in this case, I hope to create a provocative *fieldguide* that would enable producers and tourists to explore the relations between their aural and sensory assumptions and the legacies of racism embedded in these assumptions and their material manifestations.

Conclusion – Artistic Ethnography and the Possibility of Sensory Politics

In a single nexus of what is being sold as frontier heritage are noisy dynamite explosions and silent “Indian” carvings, gun-toting cowboys and their flute-playing sidekicks. If engaged separately, through a focus on what is strictly sounded, it is possible to critique some of the racist stereotypes and assumptions embedded in how sounds are used to represent and evoke lifeworlds. But, this critique would be limited, and it would fail to account for the larger role of aurality – of making audibility and its grounding noise and silence – in producing culture and community through sensory relations. Furthermore, it would fail to engage these relations as inherited or as legacies of much longer histories of violent conquest, resource extraction, and cultural assimilation. In fact, in a chapter titled “Sounds” in his 1854 *Walden* text, Henry David Thoreau details aural relations similar to those I label “frontier aurality” in my Black Hills’ research. For Thoreau (1995), the sound of deliberate life in the woods was only made sensible through the punctuated noise of the train and the silent ways of nature and Native peoples. His description is a naturalized stance of the ears that continues to subjugate Native peoples as a resource necessary to “sound” culture as alive, awake, and deliberate. But, this is a stance that cannot be heard unless sensing is engaged as relational and political, rather than as an individual act that is either purely subjective or objectively transferable. Such a “hearing together critically” requires artistic forms of ethnographic practice and representation.

Along Interstate 90, just west of Rapid City, is the Black Hills Visitor Information Center, a gateway for tourists en route to the Hills. The Center offers travel information, books tours, and houses a museum and gift shop. On its door is a yellow sign in Lakota with the words *anpétu wašté!* or “good day” in small print. Forty-five miles northwest of Rapid City is the small ex-mining community of Lead, home to George Hearst’s infamous Homestake Gold Mine, which was the oldest and largest gold mine in the Western Hemisphere when it closed in 2002. Its Independence Day fireworks over the Open Cut are among the loudest in the United States. [🔊 OpenCutFireworks] In the Black Hills, the production of “frontier aurality” is not accidental, incon-

sistent, or inconsequential. The making of a common ear is both a sensory inheritance and a subtle mode of passing along future social relations. Through the aural stances enacted at tourist and heritage venues, Native peoples and lands are consistently exploited and colonized. They are protected as valuable, spiritual silences and made inaudible by the noise and sound of technological, civilizing processes. In this case, the ethnographer must find ways to embody and share a critical aurality that does not naturalize sounded culture as the primary aural means to investigate social and political relations. To push this claim still further, these examples indicate the growing need for anthropologists to consider not just the representational politics of sense, but the deeper epistemological problems embedded in claims that sensing is knowing or even understanding or that it ought to be. These have been the foundational concerns of philosophers and artists for centuries.

The experiments I offer here grow not only from my unease with the exploitation of sense that grounds much tourist and heritage production, but also from the increased focus on sensory experience amidst anthropologists and media makers more generally and from recent attempts to legislate sense under the guises of heritage or environmental protection. The current preoccupation with various forms of sensing, from noise pollution to 3D cinema, share similar assumptions about both the morality and ethics of sense. If we could only sense more (or less), we could know more, understand more, and be more. If we could only control sense, we could preserve the past, fix the present, and protect the future. But, these presumptions deny the politics of how sensing occurs as a presently embodied experience, one that is shared and produced. It denies questions about who owns the rocks and bodies we sense through and whether these are used to extract gold or spirit or experience. And, it denies the fact that current sensory productions always respond to current sensory, social, and political problems. Contemporary aurality in the Black Hills, for example, derives from the unique ability of aural experience to produce and transform current anxieties surrounding the loss of personal sovereignty in the face of encroaching noise, out-of-control technology, and a political system detached from the “land-based” myths of many Americans. Yet, these are questions ethnographers are uniquely poised to engage if they can creatively and critically shape fieldwork encounters and their resulting research “documents” as artworks that challenge representational and epistemological regimes. Through the examples and experiments offered here, I seek to challenge ethnographic practices that do not problematize their modes of both sensing and representing the lifeworlds of others.

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